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**REMARKS OF
MELANIE I. KOLEK
CEA LEGAL COUNSEL**

**BEFORE THE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE REGARDING
H.B. NO. 5016 AN ACT IMPLEMENTING THE GOVERNOR'S
RECOMMENDATIONS CONCERNING GENERAL GOVERNMENT**

Good afternoon Senator Harp, Representative Walker, and members of the Appropriations Committee. I am Melanie Kolek, Legal Counsel of the Connecticut Education Association, proudly representing 43,000 teachers across our state. A majority of my practice is before the Workers' Compensation Commission of the State of Connecticut.

Please accept this statement as my opposition to Raised Bill No. 5016 as it pertains to changes proposed to the Workers' Compensation Act.

With respect to efficiency, the Workers' Compensation Commission is unequivocally one of the best run agencies in Connecticut. In the past fifteen years, the Workers' Compensation Commission's budget and staff have significantly decreased, even though the number of cases brought before the Commission have significantly increased. Specifically, in 1995, the budget for the Workers' Compensation Commission was in excess of \$29,500,000. The recent budget is less than \$22,250,000. The staff in 1995 was 191, and it is currently 112.

With respect to the roles and responsibilities of the Chairman of the Workers' Compensation Commission being almost completely stripped, in the bill those duties would be usurped to the Labor Commissioner as the Bill is drafted. The Labor Commissioner does not have to be an attorney or a Workers' Compensation Commissioner. For good reason, those are currently requirements to be the Workers' Compensation Chairman. An understanding of the Workers' Compensation Act and the daily running of the Workers' Compensation Commission should be a necessity for the individual running this agency, and I am hard pressed that the Labor Commissioner could effectively run this Commission given the nature of his or her numerous responsibilities elsewhere.

With respect to budgetary considerations, the Bill as drafted does not provide any cost savings for the foreseeable future, given that no employees from the Commission can be terminated or laid off until 2014, the leases for present office space for the district offices, with the exception of Middletown, run until at least 2014, and, more compelling, no tax money is provided from the State of Connecticut to the Commission's budget.

We ask you, the Appropriations Committee, to examine the Bill and question whether the proposal actually conforms to the budgetary considerations upon which the Bill is based. You will undoubtedly find that the Bill simply allocates the same resources in different ways. If the Bill is passed as proposed, we can expect the well-run Workers' Compensation Commission to deprive injured workers like that ones I represent, as well as the school districts responsible for payment of those benefits, due process. Justice delayed is justice denied.

Moreover, as echoed by many of my peers who have testified before you, new and improved statutes should not be enacted simply for the sake of change, especially if the goal of that change fails to improve government services, fails to reduce spending, and fails to adequately and promptly serve the needs of those it is intended to serve.

Thank you.